

Navajo Code Talker Fleming Begaye Sr. Dies At 97

The Navajo Nation mourns the Diné hero.

N. Jamiyla Chisholm | MAY 13, 2019 3:08PM EDT



Navajo Code Talker and WW II veteran Fleming Begaye, Sr. died on May 10, 2019, at age 97 .

Photo: Courtesy of Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer, via Facebook (@NesLizer2018)

Since Friday (May 10), the Navajo Nation (<http://www.navajo-nsn.gov/>) has been mourning the passing of Fleming Begaye, Sr., a Navajo Code Talker (<https://navajocodetalkers.org/>) and World War II's oldest living veteran. He died in Chinle, Arizona, at the age of 97.

“The Navajo Nation has lost another brave and selfless Diné warrior, who sacrificed more than we’ll ever know to defend our country,” Navajo Nation’s President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer said in a statement

(<http://www.facebook.com/NezLizer2018/photos/a.1814068968858638/2213129352285929/?type=3&theater>) on Facebook.

Born August 26, 1921, in Red Valley, Arizona, Begaye is Tódích'íi'nii (Bitter Water Clan) and born for Kíníichii'nii (Red House People Clan). He served in the Marine Corps from 1943 to 1945 in the Pacific as a Navajo Code Talker, and fought in the Battle of Tarawa (1943) and the Battle of Tinian (1944), which resulted in him spending one year in a naval hospital due to injuries. To train as a Code Talker, Begaye and others reportedly memorized 17 pages of code. While in battle, their job was to memorize messages in English, translate them, then send them to another Code Talker, who would then record the message in a logbook in English.

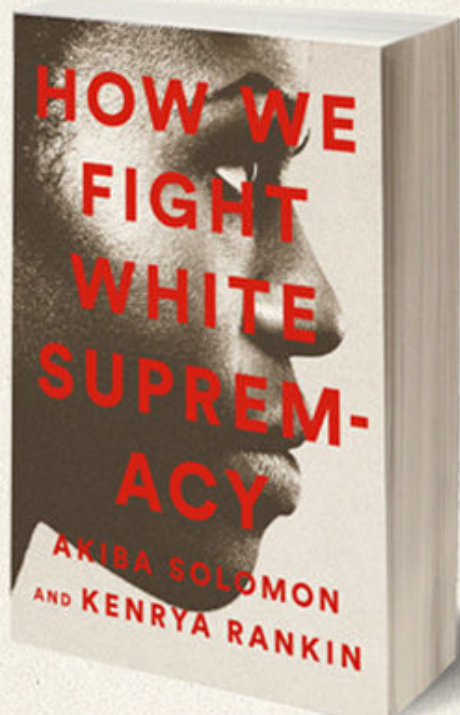
Native Americans contributed greatly in both world wars; according to the National Museum of the Native American (<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/education/codetalkers/html/chapter4.html>), an estimated 44,000 people served from a population of less than 350,000. From 1941 to 1942, the Marine Corps is said to have recruited more than 400 Navajos to serve as Code Talkers; in all, the Army, Marines and Navy recruited from at least 16 tribes.

Following Begaye's military service, he returned to the Navajo Nation where he operated a trading post called Begaye's Corner with his three children and wife Helen M. Begaye, who died in 2008.

"Code Talker Begaye was a warrior, a family man and a business man. In every aspect of his life, he was a loving person who cared greatly for his people. Today, I ask our Diné people to keep his spirit and his family in your prayers as we give thanks for his life and his legacy," Lizer said in the statement. Memorial services had not been announced at press time.

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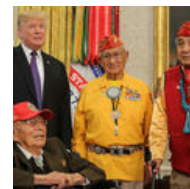
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A black and white photograph of a woman shouting into a megaphone at a protest. She is wearing a t-shirt with a graphic that says "BLACK LIVES MATTER". In the background, there is a sign that says "COPS KILL".

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